

Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the Year 1948. .

The Minister of Health has again requested that this shall be an abbreviated report as free as possible from statistical details. He particularly asks for information about:-

Action taken by the Council under Section 47 of the National Assistance Act to deal with aged or infirm people living under insanitary conditions.

Water Supplies.

Sewerage..

Control of Meat and Foods.

Outbreaks of Food Poisoning..

General Health Statistics..

There was no unusual prevalence of any epidemic disease during the year. The Birth Rate was 18.8 per thousand of population, a figure considerably below the 1947 rate of 24.5 but still higher than the National rate for 1948, viz. 17.9..

The Death Rate was 11.8 compared with 12.3 for 1947 and the National Rate for 1948 of 10.8..

Diphtheria. .

No case was notified during 1948..

It has been my custom in these Annual Reports to give figures showing the progress of immunisation and the percentage of the child population, over and under the age of five, protected thereby.. The collection of these details and the preparation of statistics has since July 5th, 1948 become the duty of the County Council as Local Health Authority under the National Health Service Act.. The figures for 1948 are not yet available..

Aged or Infirm Persons. .

This Council has so far had no occasion to use its compulsory powers under Section 47 of the new Public Assistance Act in order to get an aged or infirm person living in insanitary conditions removed to an Institution. .

The process of bringing this compulsion to bear is cumbrous and slow.. Moreover it is plainly not intended to be used if the person concerned can be persuaded to move of his own free will.. This is by no means always the case, but his consent can often be gained by tactful persuasion.. Formerly such persuasion was usually effected by the Relieving Officer, but the new Act has abolished this Officer and appointed no one with local contacts or knowledge to fill his place..

As a result, whether it was the intention of the Act or not, this function of the Relieving Officer has now devolved upon the Medical Officer of Health. The latter is brought into the picture by subsection (2) of Section 47, which requires that the Local Authority must base its procedure upon a certificate from the Medical Officer of Health.. He in fact becomes the pivotal person on whom all action depends, and it is to him that application is made when the friends, relations or Medical Attendant of an infirm person think that removal to an Institution is necessary. .

The Medical Officer's certificate must, in the words of the Act, be given only after "thorough enquiry and consideration".. It is not required if the infirm person consents to removal, but such consent is not easy to obtain and often requires a good deal of persuasion. . The Medical Officer naturally wishes to avoid compulsion and must try every possible means of inducing the person to go voluntarily. . These efforts and the thorough enquiry enjoined by the Act may take much time and often entail many visits and interviews or correspondence with relatives and neighbours.. These cases are becoming frequent and the duty of dealing with them is no light task.. A Medical man or woman is perhaps a very suitable person to perform it, but the Act does not appear to have intended that the mantle of the defunct Relieving Officer should descend upon the Medical Officer of Health. .

A special difficulty in dealing with such cases is the shortage of Institutional beds. The delay in getting accommodation for these old and infirm people has become much worse since the Act came into force. It is sometimes a matter of months before admission can be arranged. .

Water Supplies. .

The greater part of the District is still dependent on wells. Most



of these , being in the chalk formation, give a tolerably pure supply. If deep enough they yield plenty of water, but many are shallow and run dry in periods of drought..

No new piped supplies were opened in 1948, but work has begun on laying the mains of the Council's water scheme for the southern part of the District..

The number of parishes provided with piped supplies, most of them only partly, is now 14. 17 parishes remain without piped supplies. The population with piped water available is about 4,350 out of the total population of 8,440..

There are 8 separate piped supplies in the District. 5 are owned and managed by private estates and are for one reason or another unsatisfactory..

Where there is a piped supply standpipes are the usual provision.. Until sewerage is installed it is highly inadvisable to increase the number of houses with internal supplies. Too many, namely about 470, already have them..

55 samples of water were examined bacteriologically, 19 from wells and 36 from piped supplies. From the wells 11 samples gave satisfactory results and 8 unsatisfactory. Of the piped samples 26 were satisfactory and 7 unsatisfactory. Most of the latter came from a reservoir which needed cleaning. After this was done samples gave good results..

6 Chemical Analysis were also made. .

#### Sewerage. .

Owing to difficulties and delays in getting them approved the Council has been unable to make any progress with its sewerage schemes. This is a serious matter because the provision of piped water goes ahead and more and more houses are getting internal piped water and sanitation.. The cart in fact is being put before the horse.. Sewerage should come first. The Council has had to erect small and makeshift sewage disposal plants for its new housing estates. These are sure to give trouble and have in fact done so already. .

Of its larger sewerage schemes the Council has given first priority to that of Pimperne.. In this parish much new building has gone on in recent years. The new houses all have internal piped water, each house having its own cesspool. Most of this development is within half a mile of the main well from which the Blandford Waterworks draws its supply and distributes water to Blandford Town and to several of the Rural Parishes.. The catchment area of this water supply is in grave danger of being contaminated by these numerous cesspools, and their replacement by proper sewerage is an urgent matter. For this purpose the Council has had plans ready for a long time but cannot get them sanctioned. .

#### Meat and other food. .

There is no slaughter-house within the District, but this Council help in the inspection of meat in the Borough Slaughter-house.. For part of the year they lent the part-time services of an inspector, and for the other part they contributed towards the expense. .

Village food shops and cafes are regularly inspected.

Progress has been made with the inspection and improvement of cow-sheds and dairies. The number of milk producers is 211, an increase of 8 since 1947. 98 of these produce graded milk, 59 tuberculin tested and 39 accredited. .

#### Outbreaks of Food Poisoning. .

Two outbreaks involving 6 patients with one death were notified. Two families, living several miles apart in different parishes, were affected within a few days of one another in January, 1948. No connection between the two families and no article of food common to both could be discovered. Three members of each family were attacked, one adult and two children. In neither outbreak did specimens obtained from the patients yield any organism on laboratory examination which could have caused the illness. In one household tinned meat or fish paste were suspected to have caused the symptoms, but specimens of these sent to the County Laboratory yielded no bacteria. From the other household no specimens of suspected food could be obtained and in this case the illness seemed to be more of the nature of an infection, as the three patients fell ill at intervals. It was in this house that one child died with acute choleraic diarrhoea and collapse. .

JUNE, 1949..

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Medical Officer of Health. . .